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ABSTRACT

State-controlled, university-based, licensure-driven programs in the field of educational administration focus both behaviorally and technically on successfully amassing sufficient credits for certification, while little attention is given to the intermeshing of theory with practice in an attempt to provide a holistic view of leadership in the educational arena. To transcend the traditional methods of individual graduate course selection, the Experiential Program for Preparing School Principals (EPPSP) was founded in 1982 at Butler University, Indianapolis, Indiana. The 2-year programs provides 25 successful applicants with semiweekly seminars and outstanding principals or educational field leaders as exemplars. Fifty-two proficiencies for administrative excellence have also been developed to provide ongoing opportunities for the meaningful unification of theory and practice. The proficiencies include: (1) designing and implementing a staff development program; (2) submitting an article for publication in a professional journal; and (3) participating in the resolution of a volatile social issue involving home, community, and school. At each semester's conclusion, the students and faculty meet individually to discuss accomplishments and analyze failures. Although these strategies are not all-encompassing, they were designed with the specific intent of providing the aspiring principal with integrated training that illuminates the multiplicity of factors that impinge upon the daily practice of school administration in modern American society. (13 references) (KM)

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EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION: A PROACTIVE VIEW OF PRINCIPALSHIP PREPARATION

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Experiential Learning In Educational Administration: A Proactive View Of Principalship Preparation

The current professional literature is replete with a plethora of reform agendas relating directly to the field of educational administration. These agendas are often targeted most notably toward the processes and procedures that embody traditional principalship preparation. The state-controlled, university-based, licensure-driven models are indisputably under great attack. Whereas these programs focus both behaviorally and technically on successfully amassing sufficient credits for certification, little concentration is given to the intermeshing of theory with practice in an attempt to provide a holistic view of leadership in the educational arena (Cooper & Boyd, 1987). Peterson and Finn (1985) pose a truly disconcerting question when they ask: "Is there a valid relationship between what individuals do in universities in order to become licensed as educational administrators and the actual knowledge, skills, and competencies that they need to be effective unit managers and system leaders in the public schools?" (p. 42).

The purpose of this work is to explore and discuss possibilities for principalship training that reach beyond the traditional methods of individual graduate course selection. In an attempt to find solutions to the aforementioned query, this work will examine several strategies for the improvement of principalship training that have been offered as tenets to the current reform movement. Additional documentation will be provided in respect to an emerging model for principalship preparation and a

corresponding systemic environment that allows nontraditional graduate study to prosper. To merely accept the notion that there is little relationship between university preparation and the actual practice of school administration is indeed myopic -- the goal of the professorate in the field of educational administration must be to bring about meaningful change that allows theory and practice to unite in a manner that is both intellectually inspiring and professionally empowering.

Recruitment and Selection

The fundamental element surrounding all successful advanced graduate programs and/or any esteemed profession is the recruitment and selection of the most talented candidates available for admission. Aspiring principals can no longer be admitted for graduate study merely on the basis of self-selection. As the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (1989) has clearly stated: "Vigorous recruitment strategies [must] be mounted to attract the brightest and most capable candidates, of diverse race, ethnicity, and sex ..." (p. 5). Principalship training programs must actively recruit those individuals who posses the natural talent for administration. One such manner for selection would include canvassing area school districts for individuals who appear to have both the aptitude and intelligence needed for success as a school administrator (Shibles, 1988). In addition, districts should be encouraged to develop networks with these universities in an attempt to provide sites for action research, internships, and proficiency development.

As the selection criteria for graduate programs in school administration are increased, the perception of the profession will escalate as well. A self-selected, open admissions system which will absorb anyone interested in the principalship, not only denigrates administration but maligns education as a whole. Innovative and successful recruitment and selection programs are crucial as an initial step toward internal reform (Coleman and Achilles, 1987).

The Knowledge Base

Course work in the field of educational administration has been consistently regarded as lacking rigor and continuity (Coleman & Achilles, 1987; Shibles, 1988). In conjunction with these deficits, it must also be noted that faculty members employed by institutions of higher education frequently espouse theoretical knowledge without offering the corresponding practical applications for this information (The National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 1989). It is through such practices of disseminating disjointed and seemingly inapplicable information that students of educational administration have become disgruntled with their graduate preservice principalship training. The outgrowth of this dissatisfying experience is expressed in statements that categorize graduate education as "Mickey Mouse" and "Ticket Punching".

To eliminate the schism between practical knowledge and content knowledge, much has been written in respect to realigning the principalship preparation curriculum (Shibles, 1988). This realignment is proposed in an attempt to bring forth a unification between graduate programs in educational administration and other professional training programs. As

with medicine, dentistry, and law, a redesigned educational administration program will offer the student a total immersion into the policies, practices, and procedures required for effective site-based administration. These recommendations for knowledge base revision include: offering an in-depth focus on leadership and leadership development; providing increased emphasis on teaching strategies and instructional improvement; allowing for comprehensive discussions of the role of schooling in respect to the broader society; imparting an understanding of educational theory and its corresponding relationship to organizational understanding; developing research skills that allow for comprehensive investigations of future professional dilemmas; developing an awareness of the role of politics in educational administration; and providing frameworks to assist students in assessing moral and ethical implications as they relate specifically to the role of the principalship.

The words of Richard Gibboney (1987) clearly delineate a specific set of parameters around which such a comprehensive knowledge base revision process could evolve:

> Leadership in education must be rooted in the fundamental enlightenment of thought. The intellectual and moral center of education is learning and teaching. Learning and teaching, and the seminal ideas and values and exemplary practice that inform them, are all that constitute what is properly the study of education. This is all that any teacher or administrator must know. All else is secondary and supportive. It is these things that enable the managerial eye not only to see but to see with a compelling vision for the future (p. 28).

The Experiential Base

As the aspiring principal gains knowledge in respect to his/her chosen craft, so too must that individual gain experience in applying that knowledge to a myriad of differing situations. Academic preparation without field-based opportunities for application allows for little more than the amassing of pedantic rhetoric in respect to a given area of scholarly pursuit. Daresh (1988) clearly outlines the prevailing professional sentiment toward the integration of academics with field-based experience:

> From various sources ... comes a clear and consistent call for university administrator preparation programs to stop teaching about administration and, instead, direct attention toward helping people to learn how to administer schools. The suggestion in most ... proposals is for intense and meaningful internships, planned field experiences, and other forms of practica to be incorporated with increasing frequency in preparation programs (p. 17).

Although it is difficult to disagree with the aforementioned statement, it must also be noted that internships, planned field experiences, and other forms of practica are virtually meaningless without a proper mentor and adequate opportunities for professional reflection. To merely watch another individual administer at a school site and then model identically after his/her actions is little more than the implementation of an apprenticeship model. However, given the opportunity to work analytically with a specific set of site-based problems, the preservice administrator will indeed gain a great deal of acumen into the various parameters that surround any given administrative situation. As The National Policy Board for Educational Administration (1989) states: "The preparation of effective school leaders requires the physical sites, expert personnel, and diverse experiences of both

the university and the school ... And, ultimately, each site will enrich the other" (p. 23).

The Faculty

Without question, the composition of the faculty in any department of educational administration largely determines the overall quality of the program. It is for this reason that institutions of higher education must continuously labor to select individuals with the greatest degree of administrative aptitude and character. Faculty members working with preservice principals should have significant grounding and experience in the field of educational leadership and should be well versed in the teaching/learning process as well (Shibles, 1988). The modern program faculty should reflect both balance and diversity; traditional specialities such as school finance, school law, and organizational theory will be significantly enhanced by the infusion of additional professionals functioning as clinical professors (Griffiths, Stout, & Foresyth, 1988). Clinical faculty will strive to develop comprehensive internship experiences, mentorship networks, and other forms of nontraditional field-based study in an attempt to unify classroom presentations with actual professional dilemmas.

As the composition of the faculty is transfigured, the research conducted by these individuals will be modified as well. Faculty members in the field of educational administration should be recognized for prominent work in the areas of school improvement, school-based research, policy analysis, and programmatic redesign; these studies will be conducted in conjunction with the traditional qualitative and quantitative research that propels the

profession. As the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (1989) states:

> We realize these recommendations place demands upon faculty. We are asking them to do research and publish, work in schools, be excellent teachers, have administrative experience, and serve in local, state, and national organizations. These expectations are high, but the future leaders of our schools deserve faculty members who can collectively and individually meet these standards. Colleges and universities that are unwilling to allocate resources to meet such standards do not belong in the business of training educational administrators (p. 16).

Programmatic Considerations

Although the remaining sections of this work focus specifically on the notion of programmatic redesign and procedures for implementing change in the training of preservice school administrators, as a precursor, it seems only logical to mention several key program components that have been identified throughout the reform literature. Cohort group identification, cooperative learning strategies, flexible time allotments, informal learning opportunities, professional reflection seminars, and adult learning techniques have all been identified as critical elements of the principalship preparation reformation. The implementation of these nontraditional instructional methodologies will again call for radical change in respect to the complexion of many graduate training programs in the field of educational administration. It is with precisely such catalytic insight and focus that the following sections of this work are presented.

An Emerging Model For Principalship Preparation: The Role And Structure Of Redesign

The following model and subsequent role delineators outline a comprehensive programmatic redesign that relates specifically to principalship training. This emerging model attempts to encapsulate much of the research outlined in the previous sections of this work. The basis for this model is tripartite in nature; the key participants are outlined in each of the large squared areas. These "actors" are identified as: the graduate student, the university, and the practitioner/mentor. In addition to these dominant elements, three additional programmatic goals have been identified. These goals are found within the area bound by three multidirectional imprints connecting each of the aforementioned squares. The program goals for this model have been described as: scholarship, leadership, and practical experience. These areas are also interconnected in an attempt to indicate the comprehensive infusion of each goal into the various aspects of the overall program. Therefore, the fundamental thrust of this paradigm can be described as the comprehensive interaction between the graduate student, the university, and the practitioner in an attempt to provide a holistic understanding of the essential implementation of scholarship, leadership, and practical experience in regard to developing qualified candidates for the role of school principal.

To accomplish this most ambitious goal, several differing methodologies have also been outlined within the body of this work. These methodologies include techniques that focus on dissemination of information, problem solving, intellectual exploration, structured reflection, and professional

modeling. Although these strategies are not all-encompassing in nature, they are designed with the specific intent of providing the aspiring principal with an integrated training experience that clearly illuminates the multiplicity of factors that impinge upon the daily practice of school administration in modern American society.

Figure 1. An Emerging Model For Principalship Preparation

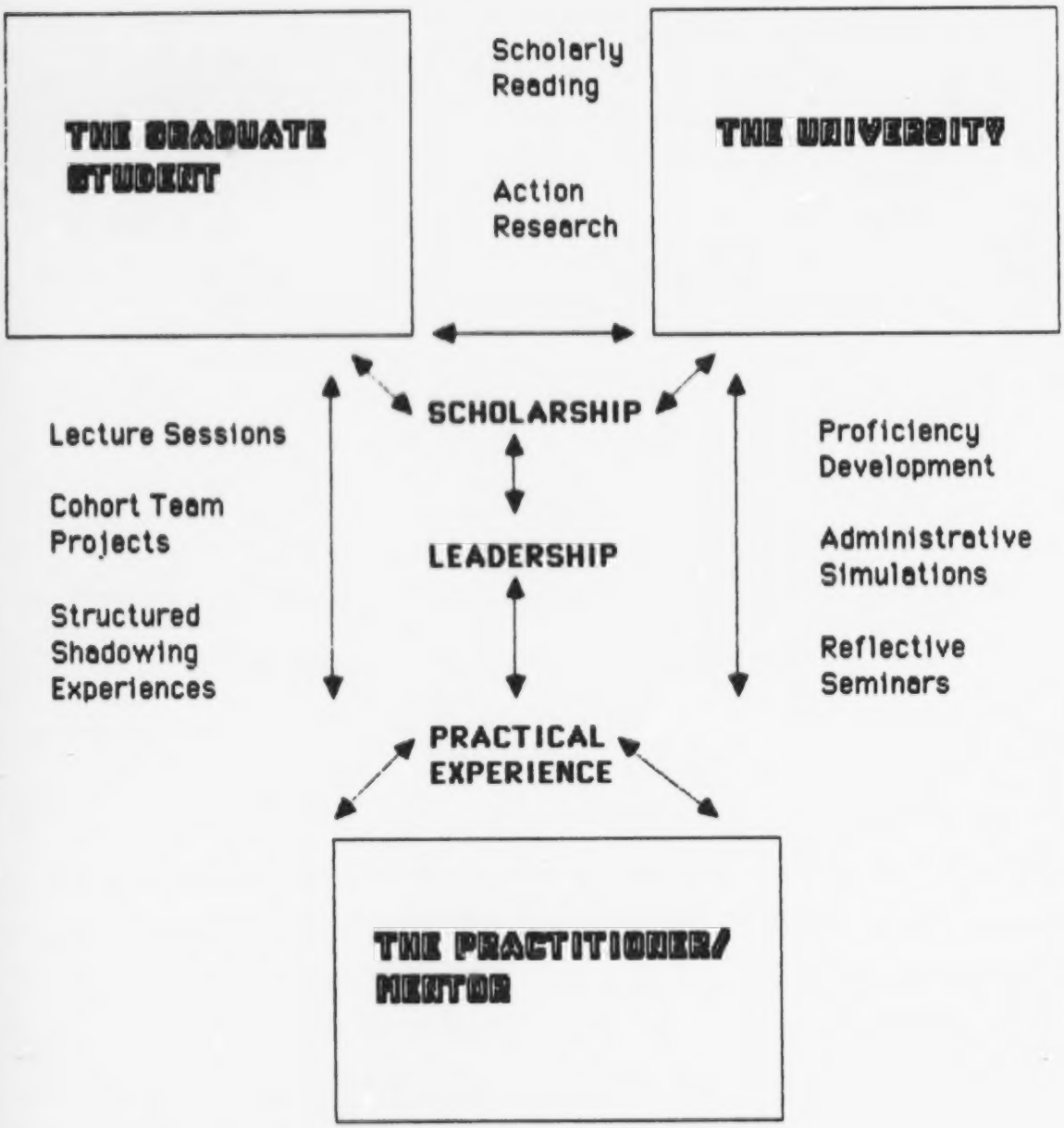

Table 1

The Role of the University

1. To provide the aspiring principal with an intellectual environment suited to the advanced study necessary in becoming a competent and capable school administrator.

2. To provide a library with holdings commensurate to the needs of an advanced graduate student in the field of educational leadership.

3. To employ a critical mass of faculty that have both practical and scholarly credentials relating specifically to the area of building-level administration.

4. To employ equally talented practitioners (on an adjunct basis) who can provide insight into the daily tribulations and exaltations of the elementary and/or secondary principalship.

5. To understand and embrace the various dimensions that surround experiential learning.

6. To provide learning opportunities and grading procedures based on the theory of andragogy and not that of pedagogy.

7. To assist mentors with the difficult task of carefully leading the neophyte administrator into the actual field of educational leadership.

8. To provide support for the graduate student as he/she becomes a part of a specific action project that may not always succeed.

9. To provide a climate that allows for reflective seminars to celebrate success and to accept failure as a part of the learning process.

10. To accept into the program only those talented individuals who demonstrate a clear commitment and understanding for the demands and rigors of the principalship.

Table 2

The Role of the Graduate Student

1. To be a willing and active participant in the learning process.

2. To attend all learning sessions with the notion that to succeed in administration one must be well prepared and willing to contribute.

3. To design and implement field-based projects that benefit the school system, as well as the graduate student.

4. To work in tandem with a capable mentor -- always looking beyond "what is" and imagining "what could be."

5. To be an amenable member of the cohort group; striving for group success at all times.

6. To be constantly immersed in the reading of research and other scholarly work relating specifically to the field of educational leadership.

7. To consistently search for learning opportunities that will solidify a foundation for excellence in educational leadership.

8. To produce research, field studies, and other documentation that will assist professionals in becoming more adept at building level administration.

9. To construct a professional portfolio that clearly describes the depth and breadth of the graduate training program from which the individual has successfully departed.

Table 3

The Role Of The Practitioner/Mentor

1. To assist the aspiring principal in all phases of professional development.

2. To demonstrate excellence in respect to the overall position of elementary or secondary principal.

3. To display and cultivate an ethical demeanor that permeates throughout all aspects of administrative action.

4. To allow the neophyte to fail and accept this failure as an integral aspect of the experiential learning process.

5. To allow the graduate student to critically critique current practices of administration and offer constructive feedback in respect to these critiques.

6. To demonstrate the vast array of human relations skills necessary for success as a building principal.

7. To model strategies of administration, including: participatory management, long-range planning, instructional leadership, goal setting, and visionary decision making.

8. To continually provide a realistic description of the profession of school administration and to evaluate the neophyte in respect to this established criterion.

9. To demonstrate a willingness to grow personally and professionally by attending seminars, workshops, and conferences with the aspiring principal.

The Experiential Program for Preparing School Principals (EPPSP)

To understand, accept, and embrace the many recommendations offered in respect to reforming the processes and procedures used to prepare school principals and, nonetheless, continue to train these individuals in a traditional fashion appears both oxymoronic and counterproductive. For this reason, Butler University in 1982 founded a neoteric program that based administrative study on experiential learning. Unlike many graduate programs, students at Butler were encouraged to develop a solid knowledge base in respect to administration but were also given numerous opportunities to acquire new skills through active experience in the profession. The Experiential Program for Preparing School Principals (EPPSP) was designed and continues to operate as an andragogical learning center. As a center for adult learning, students work on projects as collaborative teams; learn through self-direction; capitalize on prior experience; and actively engage in critical and reflective thinking processes (Moore, 1988). Through the use of research like that conducted by Lieberman and Miller (1981), Stallings and Mohlman (1981), and Berman and McLaughlin (1976), it was concluded that the most effective mode for bringing about meaningful improvements across the entire strata of K-12 education was to educate principals in a manner that reflected the most positive elements of comprehensive staff development. These elements include (Griffin, 1983):

1. participant design and interaction

2. a mitigation, to some degree, of status between participant and instructor

3. the formation of presentations based upon a careful analysis of the profession and group at hand

4. flexibility in respect to the needs of the participants and the university environment.

Each October the selection process begins for a new group of EPPSP students. Applicants are arduously screened in respect to prior experience, academic background, professional recommendations, degree status, and an individual interview with a selection committee. As the cohort group is selected, these twenty-five men and women will work together throughout a two-year period. During this time, knowledge, skills, and experiences will be provided in an attempt to afford a secure foundation in respect to the essentials of school leadership. Topics are discussed in semi-weekly seminars that include: staff and student personnel, school/community relations, organizational behavior, leadership theory, supervision, curriculum development, scheduling and budgeting, school law, and school plant management.

Through the use of an experiential instructional model, students are no longer expected to merely study about curricular issues, about financial practices, or about the management of school facilities. These students are encouraged to actively acquire new information to strive for identification and understanding of complex concepts and to perceive, as well as synthesize, the future implication for this newly acquired informational base. The integration of administrative content with the practice of leadership

provides each member of the cohort group with the opportunity to embrace the essential concepts of this learning methodology.

Mentorship opportunities and structured shadowing experiences are carefully developed in order to serve as an integral element of this preservice administrative program. Outstanding principals and other recognized leaders in the field are called upon frequently to serve as exemplars for these aspiring elementary and secondary school administrators. As the graduate student interacts with selected mentors, the opportunity to model appropriate professional behavior and to reflect upon inappropriate action is continuously afforded. Therefore, seminar sessions often become a type of reflective practicum, where students continuously struggle with the dichotomy between theory and practice (Schon, 1987).

Fifty-two proficiencies for administrative excellence have also been developed in an attempt to provide an ongoing opportunity for theory and practice to unite in a meaningful fashion. These administrative proficiencies include:

1. Conducting a needs assessment.
2. Designing, developing, and implementing a staff development program.
3. Participating in an effort to improve cultural understanding and human relations in a school community.
4. Forming a partnership with the community using various resources to enhance the educational atmosphere.
5. Leading a team of teaching professionals in a

problem solving process, resulting in a resolution of an instructional dilemma.

6. Submitting an article for publication in a professional journal.

7. Influencing the local media in a fashion that results in a news release that is favorable to education.

8. Conducting a follow-up study of graduates to determine overall school effectiveness.

9. Writing a grant proposal for external funding with the intent of improving a significant aspect of the educational environment.

10. Participating in the resolution of a volatile social issue involving home, community, and school.

As each semester concludes, the student and faculty meet on an individual basis to discuss the many accomplishments that have transpired during the preceding academic term. These discussion sessions or exit interviews have become a significant part of the overall learning and growing process. Here each student has the opportunity to celebrate success, as well as analyze failure. During this time, comprehensive projects are discussed and additional ventures are planned for the forthcoming semesters. During the final phase of EPPSP, students copiously compile data relating to the many studies and projects that have been implemented during this two year program. As these portfolios are reviewed, faculty members are perpetually amazed by the thorough and holistic nature of each documented journal. These portfolios contain a cornucopia of administrative experiences, including activities such as: district-wide computer networking projects, revised substitute handbooks for elementary and secondary schools, redesigned teacher evaluation packages, new staff

development projects for specific grade levels and subject areas, and the presentation of curriculum guides for previously unoffered courses.

Upon completion of the program, former students immediately become an integral part of the professional networking process. These individuals are consistently encouraged to share their knowledge and experience with those neophytes just beginning the two-year program. Certain graduates, as they assume significant positions in the field of educational leadership, also serve as mentors to members of other cohort groups. Those graduates who do not serve in a mentorship capacity often join class sessions as presenters or facilitators. This exchange of ideas from past group members to present participants allows for the opportunity to showcase success, as well as display the outstanding teaching abilities that practicing administrators often possess. The intended outcome for this integration of past with present is the development of professional bonding and identification. It is through such bonding that professionalism is heightened and commitment is displayed. Therefore, administrators and those who aspire to such positions are provided with the opportunity to see the role of the principalship as a cyclical one requiring continued professional development.

Conclusion

The stilted and stylized nature of many graduate programs in educational administration is unmistakably under attack. Reform agendas, redesign literature, and other notions addressing a reconceptualization of the training of school principals are indeed in a present state of proliferation. In response to this attack and corresponding redesign movement, a large

number of comprehensive and doctoral granting institutions have begun and will continue to restructure their training programs for school principals. The ideas, techniques, methodologies, and resulting schemata outlined in this work are provided with the intent of offering assistance to others attempting to engineer programs that break from the traditional mold. To envision a profession that embraces interdisciplinary intellectualism, respects technical competencies, understands multicultural human relations skills, and values compassionate advocacy for all students is the dream of those who founded EPPSP. It is the sincere hope of the present program faculty that this dream will indeed become a reality through the comprehensive use of nontraditional learning opportunities -- opportunities that truly allow the student to transpose theory and practice within the confines of any professional setting.

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